

ACT-NOW

FACT SHEET 32

Using Visual Supports in the Preschool Environment: Timetables & Schedules



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Using Visual Supports in the preschool environment: Timetables and Schedules

Most young children with autism have trouble with change. They prefer things to stay the same, especially their routines. They often become preoccupied with favourite activities and objects and moving on to new activities can make them anxious and uncooperative. In other words, they often prefer to “do their own thing, in their own time and in their own way”. This can result in children with autism having difficulty fitting in with and coping with the ever-changing preschool environment because of:

- Fear of new tasks/activities
- Not knowing what to do in creative/open-ended activities such a pasting or painting
- Preference for a narrow range of well known activities (within their comfort zone)
- Little motivation to complete activities of someone else’s choosing
- Difficulty or anxiety with having to make a choice

The use of visual supports, specifically visual timetables and schedules, can decrease anxiety and increase understanding in children with autism in the preschool environment.

Why use a timetable or schedule?



Children with autism prefer routine and same-ness and can become anxious when they do not know what is going to happen next or what to expect throughout the day. Timetables and schedules can provide structure and information about what is going to happen, allay fears and uncertainties, and allow the child to participate more fully throughout the day.

Clear timetables and schedules:


- Tell the child what’s happening next
- Help the child transition from one activity to another
- Help the child with organising and attending
- Help to increase the child’s motivation to participate in a range of activities
- Help to structure the child’s day

NB: Before using a timetable or schedule, it is important to ascertain the child’s level of understanding. For example does the child recognise line drawings or only photographs? How many pictures can the child understand on the one page? How many steps can be presented at once on the timetable/schedule?

How do I use a timetable in the preschool environment?

- Depict the important parts of the day in chronological sequence (either vertically or horizontally)
- Discuss each of the activities with the child at the beginning of the session/day. Highlight any activities that are likely to change (due to weather conditions, for example), to prepare the child for the possibility of a change in routine
- As each activity has been completed, remove it from the schedule board and place it in a “finished” pocket. 
- **NB:** If an activity on the schedule is changed, do not remove it from the schedule board. Instead, put a “” sign over the activity, and place the replacement activity alongside or underneath the original picture

How do I use an individual schedule in the preschool environment?

- Baseline the number and type of play activities the child is currently accessing independently
- Note the highly preferred activities – these may later be used as motivators/rewards for participating in non-preferred activities
- Place a photo/picture of 2-3 activities the child is currently accessing on the schedule, with a photo of the most motivating activity at the bottom
- The expectation is that the child completes the set 2-3 activities prior to accessing the motivator.
- As each activity is completed, the corresponding photo/picture is placed in the finished box/envelope 
- Once all 2-3 activities have been completed, provide the child with labelled praise eg. “good choosing” or “good playing”.
- Provide the motivator straight away, for immediate reinforcement
- Once the child has grasped the concept of the schedule, gradually increase the number of tasks required of the child before accessing the motivator (no more than 4-5).
- Once the child has grasped the concept of the schedule, you can also gradually increase the number of activities to be completed that are non-preferred prior to accessing the motivator. This is one way of increasing a child’s exposure to a range of play experiences in order to develop their skills.

Why might I use a timetable for home routines as well?

- Develop child's independence in daily routines
- Assist child to differentiate between kinder/school days and days with other commitments
- Assist child in organising the sequence of required tasks

How would I use a timetable at home?

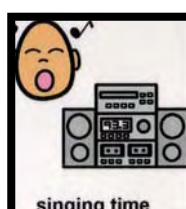
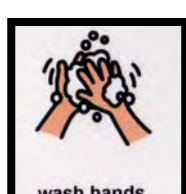
- Depict the important parts of the routine in chronological order (either vertically or horizontally). If the child can match a clock face, you can add a time next to the activity to indicate when it should be completed. This can help a child who gets easily distracted to stay more focused.
- Discuss each of the activities with the child at the beginning of the day.
- The child moves through the routine independently, removing each activity from the board as it is completed.

NB: This strategy is introduced in much the same way as the individual schedule above. Home routine activities may be considered to be non-preferred by the child so a preferred activity would be added at the end of the schedule as a reward for compliance.

See next page for examples:

Examples of Schedules and Timetables:

Preschool Timetable:



Home Timetable:

